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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000499

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP/PMBS, DRL/CRA, INR/EAP, EAP/PD
NSC FOR GREEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL TEAM INVESTIGATES SLAYINGS OF
JOURNALISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

REF: A. MANILA 0312

[1B.](#) 04 MANILA 5775
[1C.](#) 04 MANILA 5220
[1D.](#) 04 MANILA 4331
[1E.](#) 04 MANILA 4251
[1F.](#) 04 MANILA 3999

[11.](#) (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified -- please handle accordingly.

[12.](#) (SBU) Summary: A fact-finding team organized by the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) January 24-31 investigated recent media killings (at least 13 in 2004). Its initial conclusions are that there is "a widespread culture of violence" in the Philippines that allows for killings of those in the media, and that the GRP effectively condones this violence. During the visit, there were two more media-related attacks, in which one person was killed and another severely injured. Mission continues to urge the GRP to take firm steps to prosecute and convict those involved in such slayings. End Summary.

[13.](#) (SBU) A fact-finding team organized by the IFJ and the NUJP (IFJ's local affiliate) January 24-31 investigated the numerous attacks on journalists in 2004. On January 31, Poloff met with team members Gerard Noonan, a correspondent for the "Sydney Morning Herald," and Carlos Conde, local stringer for "The New York Times" and chief of the NUJP, to discuss the situation.

[14.](#) (SBU) According to Noonan and Conde, the five-member IFJ-NUJP team consisted of journalists from Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines and visited General Santos City in Mindanao, Cebu and Iloilo in the Central Philippines, and Manila and Legazpi in Luzon. The team met with family members of victims and representatives from the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Department of Justice, local government agencies, and the Commission on Human Rights. The immediate impetus for the fact-finding mission was the release of IFJ's report on worldwide violence against journalists and others in the media in early January 2005, which noted that the Philippines had recorded 13 killings of journalists in 2004, a figure second only to Iraq's. (Note: The GRP's "Task Force Newsmen," which the GRP created in late 2004 to crack down on the killings, has estimated the number of media-related slayings in 2004 at 10, based on different definitions of which killings might have been media-related and which were not. Other human rights organizations variously cite between 10 to 13 killings. End note)

[15.](#) (SBU) The team plans to file its final report in about two weeks, but its initial conclusion is that "a widespread culture of violence" exists in the Philippines and helps fuel the killings. Mayors in two major cities in the central and southern part of the country (Cebu, Davao) have been implicated by human rights organizations in vigilante-style killings of alleged criminals (reflets). The 2004 national elections included at least 121 killings during the course of the campaigns. Published remarks attributed to police and other influential persons, such as former president Estrada, have seemed to encourage violence against journalists. (Estrada recently indicated that he supported attacks similar to one that totally destroyed a news van in January 2005, although he said he was not responsible for the initial torching.) The report will emphasize that such a climate has "a chilling effect" on working journalists and the practice of their craft, and threatens freedom of the press in the Philippines.

[16.](#) (SBU) Echoing conclusions in the initial report, Noonan claimed that the GRP's response has been "completely unacceptable in a democratic country" like the Philippines. Despite repeated pledges from GRP officials to bring perpetrators to justice, courts have convicted only one person related to any of the estimated 55 killings of journalists and others in media-related positions since 1986, he noted. (Note: Other sources have cited two convictions. End note) Noonan told poloff that he had wanted to discuss

the team's initial findings with President Arroyo, but her office could not arrange an appointment due to her "busy schedule."

17. (U) The IFJ-NUJP investigation took place against a backdrop of continued media-related violence. On January 29, two unidentified gunmen shot and severely injured the editor and publisher of the Tagum City-based "Mindanao Truck News." The editor had frequently written commentaries in his regular column about corruption, poor government services, and illegal logging. Local police are still investigating the case; no arrests have been made. On January 26, a technician at a government-owned radio station in Baguio City was shot dead while on his way to work. Again, there have been no arrests so far.

18. (SBU) GRP officials have asserted that the GRP is doing its best. Presidential Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye claimed publicly that the "majority" of cases involving slayings of journalists have been "solved" by the "Task Force Newsmen" and labeled as "misleading" IFJ claims that the Philippines is one of the most dangerous countries for reporters. Critics have responded that "solving" cases to the GRP often means no more than identifying a suspect, not even capture or arrest, much less conviction.

19. (SBU) Comment: Mission continues to urge the GRP to take firm steps to arrest, prosecute, and convict those involved in such slayings. While media killings indeed have had a chilling effect on investigative reporting to some degree, some courageous journalists continue to investigate sensitive issues such as corruption. Septel will report on one notable NGO -- the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) -- for which Mission will seek to identify channels of funding to provide support.

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